

Remarks of Congressman Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
Scott Amendment (#62) to H.R. 1, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009
Rule Committee
January 27, 2009
3:30 p.m.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Madam Chairwoman, this amendment would ensure that billions of taxpayers’ dollars will not be used to condone discrimination and I offer this amendment in order to preserve civil rights.

Madam Chairwoman, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted in order to end the sorry history of bigotry in this Nation. Since that time, it has been illegal to discriminate in employment against protected classes. One exception exists for churches and religious organizations, but it is limited to the context of a religious organization using its own money. However, since 1965, the federal government has prohibited any employment discrimination with federal taxpayer’s money, at least until the so-called “faith based initiative.”

Religious organizations have long been at the forefront of addressing the nation’s most pressing social problems, and I support that. But let’s be clear. This is not a debate about the right of religious organizations to participate in job training programs or programs that provide social services to an American public very much in need; they already do. For decades, without any “faith-based initiatives”, Catholic, Jewish, Lutheran, and Baptist organizations have been receiving billions of dollars everyday to run federally funded programs. Religious organizations can continue to receive federal money and aid the American public, so long as they agree to not engage in discriminatory practices with the federal money.

Any program that can receive money without this amendment can still receive money with it, if the sponsoring organization would agree not to discriminate in employment and its practices with the federal money.

Moreover, when government refuses to prohibit discrimination based on religion, it cannot effectively enforce nondiscrimination provisions based on race or national origin. Many churches are, to the nearest percentage, 100% white or black. So if you restrict hiring based on your religious organization, you can effectively discriminate based on race. And if we don’t enforce discrimination laws in federal contracts, with secular programs, where is our moral authority to tell private employers, who may be devoutly religious, what they can do with their private money?

Finally, Madam Chairwoman, we are all excited for the new administration which has already demonstrated a commitment to nondiscrimination and civil rights. As we prepare to offer hundreds of billions of dollars in relief to our struggling economy, we should highlight the fact that it is all Americans that have been hurt by this crisis and it is all Americans that should receive the benefits of this stimulus legislation. Thank you.